

Present Levels of Educational Performance

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The Present Level section of the GIEP provides a base-line for setting the goals, objectives, and specially designed instruction for the student. Establishing and measuring accurate levels is a key component for GIEP development. PLEP's should be established annually and differ from the previous year.

Gifted assessment needs to be commensurate with the child's abilities, developmental rates, pre-existing knowledge and skills – not on their chronological age or grade.

PLEP assessments must provide information on the following questions:

1. What are the student's areas of academic strength and weaknesses?
2. Do the areas of strength warrant acceleration or is enrichment adequate?
3. If acceleration is indicated, what steps must be taken to ensure success of the placement?

Selecting the correct measures to determine the present level for gifted student requires consideration of gifted traits. A gifted student will "ceiling out" on in-grade level assessments, whether nationally normed or a local test. Therefore the measurement of growth on these assessments will only provide minimal information. If a student starts with a 96% on an assessment, there is only a 4% margin to document growth. Above level testing will document a broader range of skills and content.

PLEP information may go beyond grade level information. It may also include affective, behavioral and developmental issues since these may all impact on grade level achievement of the student. These parameters are difficult to measure for progress and growth.

Another issue is that the type of skills that are emphasized in the content for gifted students do not match present level assessments well. Most leveling tests are assessing factual data, content and processes. Gifted student instruction emphasizes problem solving, higher order thinking, research skills, leadership skills and creative abilities. Assessments rarely address these areas. Although these skills are emphasized at all educational placement levels, the instructional emphasis may not transfer directly to "grade level" performance.

Because gifted students retain data and content readily, they do well on content based assessments. This approach excludes the transferable skills listed above and therefore portfolio and product based assessments tools can help determine the depth, breadth and growth of important skill development

Assessment should always be approached through multiple avenues using above level measures and include the aforementioned skills in addition to grade level content.

Standardized Assessments

PLEP's have two distinct types of measures that can be used: nationally or state normed assessments and the local district curricular assessments. Both provide essential but different types of information. Nationally and state normed assessments can provide a comparison of what percentile rank this student places in when compared to a large group of peers on standardized content and questions. This data can help determine if the overall grade level assignment is at an appropriate level. Local curriculum based assessments are necessary to determine the details for instruction – what is missing and what is known for the curriculum being taught within that district.

It is important to note that a gifted child may “ceiling out” on both types of assessments. It is appropriate to use above grade level assessments to determine the breadth of the child's knowledge and experience. Often, students may all ready know more than 70 - 90% of the information presented at their grade level. If the assessment is too easy, gifted students may make the questions more complex and select wrong answers or read the questions so quickly that careless errors are made.

The standards for curriculum have been written for a minimum level that students must achieve for a grade level. The goals for gifted students should rarely be at the proficient level for the standards. Also, since these assessments are focused on achievement of minimum goals, they rarely measure the potential for excelling or meeting maximum expectations. The PSSA data can provide grade level information but not above level information to guide future instruction.

See the attached chart that summarizes different types of assessments.

Report Card Grades

PLEP assessments should offer specific grade level results for each academic subject – especially in the areas of gifted ability. Report card grades do not establish specific grade level instructional information. They only present information based on that teacher's grading scale and the content presented. Grades include items like responsibility with homework, effort or neatness and they do not necessarily reflect ability in the content area. PLEP's need to go beyond the report card information.

Curriculum Based Assessments

There is not one test that will cover all the content areas and assessments to establish PLEP will have to be content area and grade level specific. Curriculum Based Assessments (CBA's) can be effective for diagnostic information on specific skills. Use of district material will relate directly to the district standards, goals and instruction. These assessments are usually pencil and paper in nature. Behavioral

Assessments, Performance Assessments and Mastery Learning Steps are alternatives not based on paper and pencil.

The National Association for Gifted Children recommends that assessments should meet the following criteria for instructional decisions:

1. Measure important learning outcomes
2. Address (a) instructional placement (b) help measure instructional progress and (c) provide diagnostic information for content difficulties to develop instructional plans
3. Provide clear descriptions of student performance that can be linked to instructional action
4. Be compatible with a variety of instructional models
5. Be easily administered, scored and interpreted by teachers
6. Communicate the goals of learning to both students and teachers
7. Generate accurate, meaningful information

Teacher Observations

These are important and helpful for study skill abilities, peer relationships and indicators for leadership abilities. However, to determine PLEP, this data is subjective unless based on pre- and post-test information.

Content Area Achievement Tests; Organization Specific Tests

Individual achievement tests are subject specific and some out of grade level problems are included. The student is compared to other students of similar age and grade level. The data is statistically valid but it will not relate directly to the curriculum being taught.

Assessment Considerations

All assessments should be weighed for the validity of the data they provide. Do the assessments actually provide a meaningful measure of the child's current ability in the content area?

Data that references "grade level equivalent scores," does *not* mean that the student is working at that grade level. This data indicates that an average child in the referenced grade level would achieve that score on that assessment. This does not provide instructional placement information but can indicate that assessments at a different grade level may be indicated.

References

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